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Paul: To Wickywoo and the monkeys.
凱蒂：獻給我摯愛的父親

The Paul Noble Method

Over the years, I have taught many, many people. Curiously, they have each had much the same story to tell regarding their previous experiences of language learning. As a result, these days, when I first start a teaching session, I ask my students to raise their hands if they have had any of the following experiences.

Raise your hand, I say:

- **If you studied a language for several years at school but came out unable to really say anything.**
- **If you have ever bought a language course and given up around page thirty, somewhere around chapter two.**
- **If you have ever felt more confused by a teacher's explanation of the language than by the language itself.**
- **If you have ever been amazed by just how closely grammar books resemble furniture assembly instructions.**
- **If you have ever felt that you may in fact be more or less incapable of learning a foreign language.**

Invariably, all the students soon have at least one hand in the air – and they laugh. They laugh because for some reason our language-learning experiences tend to be very similar and, sadly, these similar experiences tend not to be very good ones.

My own initial experiences of language learning were also uncannily similar to those described above. In fact, when I ask my students these questions, my own hand is the first to go up – and it stays up until we have gone through them all.

However, these less than positive experiences have had an upside both for myself and for those individuals I have taught because they, along with a number of other factors, have helped inform and shape the method that will be used during this course.

Using this method, you will learn how to communicate in Chinese and how to formulate your own ideas and thoughts using Chinese.

As you learn with it, you will quickly discover that I do not use complicated grammatical explanations at all, and I will not ask you to memorise long lists of vocabulary – the way the course is structured will by itself ensure that you remember what you are taught. Instead, through your interaction with the recording, I will lead you through the Chinese language, enabling you to build up complex sentences by yourself, step by step, so that you are actually speaking independently in Chinese by the end of the course. And this is regardless of how little, or how much, you know when you begin.

The Paul Noble Method

You will also discover that the language I teach is designed to be adaptable, so that you will be able to use it just as easily for holidaying in China as for living or working there; it will be just as easy to use it to order a Chinese meal as to hold a conversation with the waiter who brings it to you. And, again, all of this regardless of how little, or how much, you know when you begin.

At the time of writing, this method has already proved extremely successful with a very great many students, including countless so-called “no-hopers”. Interestingly, not one of these students failed to learn using this method. It is these many success cases, letters of thank you – and even the occasional hug – that have made teaching languages so very worthwhile for me and it is this which has persuaded me to publish my courses here, for the first time.

I anticipate and hope that they will be as effective for you as they have been for so many of my other students.

Paul Noble

Paul Noble
Head of the Paul Noble Language Institute

How to use this booklet

This booklet has been designed to provide you with a quick and easy way to review and reinforce the key vocabulary, structures and contents of your Paul Noble Method Chinese course.

Although the core part of your learning will take place via your use of the accompanying course recordings, we have also included this booklet in order to provide you with a quick reference guide to the language.

It is worth noting that this booklet should be used **after** you have begun working through the audio recording. It will serve as excellent reinforcement, guidance and review material but is not designed to teach you Chinese by itself. This is what the audio recording will do – and very rapidly too. After you have begun listening to the course, you will then find this booklet to be an extremely useful review and reference resource but you must start by listening to the recording first.

So, if you haven't done so already, go and press play on that first audio track and get started. You're about to find out just how good a course this is!

Core course review

The best way to use this part of your booklet is to start by reading through a page, looking at both the English and the Chinese. Then go back to the beginning of that same page and, while covering the Chinese side of the text, translate the English into Chinese – just as you did when you listened to the audio part of the course.

Once you can get 90% of a page's content correct, move on to the next page and follow the process again. By doing this, you will quickly recall and reinforce what you learnt with the course recordings.

A note about the format

Each sentence provided in the core course review is laid out with the English on the left-hand side and the Chinese on the right.

The Chinese side provides three written versions of the Chinese translation. For example:

I want fried noodles.

我要炒麵。

我要炒面。

Wǒ yào chǎo miàn.

All three versions say exactly the same thing in Chinese

The top version is a translation of the English that has been written in traditional Chinese characters. This is the written form of Chinese currently used in Taiwan and Hong Kong.

The middle version is a translation of the English that has been written in simplified Chinese characters. This is the written form of Chinese currently used in Mainland China.

The bottom version is a translation of the English that has been written in the Romanized version of Chinese, known as "Pinyin". It is used by non-Chinese to read the language. It includes tone marks to let you know which tone to use for each syllable.

Use whichever helps you most

I have included all three versions here so that you can use this booklet in whichever way suits you best.

If you are mostly interested in learning to speak the language then you will probably want to read the bottom, Romanized version. If you are planning to learn the written language used in Mainland China, you will wish to learn how to read the middle, simplified version. If you are planning to learn the written language used in Taiwan and Hong Kong, you will wish to learn how to read the top, traditional version.

The present

Talking about what you want, can and would like to do.

Want

I want

我要
我要
Wǒ yào

chow mein / fried noodles

炒麵
炒面
chǎo miàn

I want fried noodles.

我要炒麵。
我要炒面。
Wǒ yào chǎo miàn.

tofu

豆腐
豆腐
dòufu

I want tofu.

我要豆腐。
我要豆腐。
Wǒ yào dòufu.

and

和
和
hé

I want tofu and fried noodles.

我要豆腐和炒麵。
我要豆腐和炒面。
Wǒ yào dòufu hé chǎo miàn.

not

不
不
bù

I don't want / I not want

我不要
我不要
Wǒ bù yào

The present

I don't want tofu and fried noodles.	我不要豆腐和炒麵。 我不要豆腐和炒面。 Wǒ bù yào dòufu hé chǎo miàn.
You want	你要 你要 Nǐ yào
spoken question mark	嗎? 吗? ma?
fried rice	炒飯 炒饭 chǎo fàn
Do you want fried rice?	你要炒飯嗎? 你要炒饭吗? Nǐ yào chǎo fàn ma?
Yes.	要。 要。 Yào.
No.	不要。 不要。 Bù yào.

NOTE! To answer “yes” or “no” to a question in Chinese, you simply repeat part of what you’ve been asked. If you’re asked “do you **want** fried rice?” you’ll simply say “**want**” in order to answer “yes”. And, if you want to answer “no”, you’ll simply say “**not want**”. It’s really fairly simple and logical – once you get used to it.

Pockmarked Grandma's Tofu / mapo tofu	麻婆豆腐 麻婆豆腐 mápó dòufu
Do you want mapo tofu?	你要麻婆豆腐嗎? 你要麻婆豆腐吗? Nǐ yào mápó dòufu ma?

Don't you want mapo tofu?

你不要麻婆豆腐嗎？
 你不要麻婆豆腐吗？
 Nǐ bù yào mápó dòufu ma?

● **NOTE!** As well as using the spoken question mark “嗎?”/“吗?”/“ma?” to ask questions, you can also use a “want-not-want” type of construction.

Do you want? (WNW¹)

你要不要？
 你要不要？
 Nǐ yào bù yào?

Do you want fried rice and mapo tofu? (WNW)

你要不要炒飯和麻婆豆腐？
 你要不要炒饭和麻婆豆腐？
 Nǐ yào bù yào chǎo fàn hé mápó dòufu?

tea

茶
 茶
 chá

Do you want tea and mapo tofu? (WNW)

你要不要茶和麻婆豆腐？
 你要不要茶和麻婆豆腐？
 Nǐ yào bù yào chá hé mápó dòufu?

Yes.

要。
 要。
 Yào.

Yes, I want tea and mapo tofu.

要，我要茶和麻婆豆腐。
 要，我要茶和麻婆豆腐。
 Yào, wǒ yào chá hé mápó dòufu.

No.

不要。
 不要。
 Bù yào.

No, I don't want tea and mapo tofu.

不要，我不要茶和麻婆豆腐。
 不要，我不要茶和麻婆豆腐。
 Bù yào, wǒ bù yào chá hé mápó dòufu.

¹ Whenever you see “WNW” next to a question, this means you should construct this sentence using a “want-not-want” type of construction rather than using the spoken question mark “嗎?”/“吗?”/“ma?”

NOTE! Just as in English, you can give short “yes” or “no” answers to questions or you can be very emphatic and say things like “No, I don’t want tea and mapo tofu.” Most of the time, of course, just like in English, you’ll probably just say “yes” or “no” but, if you feel you need to be very emphatic, you at least know how to do so!

He wants

他要
他要
Tā yào

He doesn't want

他不要
他不要
Tā bù yào

to go / to go to

去
去
qù²

Beijing

北京
北京
Běijīng

Does he want to go to Beijing?
(W/W)

他要不要去北京?
他要不要去北京?
Tā yào bù yào qù Běijīng?

He doesn't want to go to Beijing.

他不要去北京。
他不要去北京。
Tā bù yào qù Běijīng.

She doesn't want

她不要
她不要
Tā bù yào

Shanghai

上海
上海
Shànghǎi

² “To go” – “qù” – is pronounced in an interesting way. To say it correctly, you simply round your lips as though you are going to whistle and then, while keeping your lips still clearly rounded, say the “chee” from cheese. Do that and you’ll pronounce “qù” perfectly!

She doesn't want to go to Shanghai. 她不要去上海。
她不要去上海。
Tā bù yào qù Shànghǎi.

Would like

I would like 我想要
我想要
Wǒ xiǎng yào

I would like tea. 我想要茶。
我想要茶。
Wǒ xiǎng yào chá.

special fried rice / house fried rice / Yangzhou fried rice 揚州炒飯
揚州炒飯
Yángzhōu chǎo fàn

I would like special fried rice and tea. 我想要揚州炒飯和茶。
我想要揚州炒飯和茶。
Wǒ xiǎng yào Yángzhōu chǎo fàn hé chá.

I would like to go 我想去
我想去
Wǒ xiǎng qù

NOTE! As you learned during the course, to say “I would like to go” you can also say “wǒ xiǎng yào qù” / “我想要去” – this is in no way incorrect and is perfectly normal to say. However, it is very common to shorten this to simply “wǒ xiǎng qù” / “我想去” as you did during the course.

Nanjing 南京
南京
Nánjīng

I would like to go to Nanjing. 我想去南京。
我想去南京。
Wǒ xiǎng qù Nánjīng.

The present

restaurant / a restaurant / meal hall 餐廳
餐厅
cāntīng

I would like to go to a restaurant. 我想去餐廳。
我想去餐厅。
Wǒ xiǎng qù cāntīng.

You would like to go to a restaurant. 你想去餐廳。
你想去餐厅。
Nǐ xiǎng qù cāntīng.

**Would you like to go to a restaurant? /
You would like to go to a
restaurant ma?** 你想去餐廳嗎？
你想去餐厅嗎？
Nǐ xiǎng qù cāntīng ma?

Yes. 想。
想。
Xiǎng.

No. 不想。
不想。
Bù xiǎng.

NOTE! So again, to answer “yes” or “no” to a question in Chinese, we once more need to repeat part of what we’ve been asked. So, if you’re asked “You **would like** to go to a restaurant ma?” (“Nǐ xiǎng qù cāntīng ma?”) you’ll simply say “**would like**” (“xiǎng”) in order to answer “yes”. And, if you want to answer “no”, you’ll simply say “**not would like**” (“bù xiǎng”). If you think about it, it’s fairly logical – you’re asked whether you **would like** to do something and you reply either **would like** or **not would like** in order to answer that question.

to eat 吃
吃
chī

dinner 晚餐
晚餐
wǎncān

Would you like to go to a restaurant to eat dinner?

你想去餐廳吃晚餐嗎？
你想去餐厅吃晚餐吗？
Nǐ xiǎng qù cāntīng chī wǎncān ma?

You (MTO³)

你們
你们
Nimen

Would you like to go to a restaurant to eat dinner? (MTO)

你們想去餐廳吃晚餐嗎？
你们想去餐厅吃晚餐吗？
Nimen xiǎng qù cāntīng chī wǎncān ma?

You would like to eat... (MTO)

你們想吃…
你们想吃…
Nimen xiǎng chī…

● **NOTE!** Again, note that, when “would like” is followed by “to eat” you can use the shortened version of “would like”. This is the case whenever “would like” is followed by “to... something”. So, “to go”, “to eat”, “to order”, “to do / to make”, “to buy”, “to sell”, “to use” and so on – these can all be used with the shortened version of “would like”.

Would you like to eat dinner?
(MTO)

你們想吃晚餐嗎？
你们想吃晚餐吗？
Nimen xiǎng chī wǎncān ma?

breakfast

早餐
早餐
zǎocān

Would you like to eat breakfast?
(MTO)

你們想吃早餐嗎？
你们想吃早餐吗？
Nimen xiǎng chī zǎocān ma?

They

他們
他们
Tamen

³ Whenever you see “MTO”, this lets you know that you need to use the Chinese word for “you” that you use when you’re talking to More Than One Person. So, if you see “MTO” use “nimen”.

The present

Would they like to eat breakfast?	他們想吃早餐嗎？ 他們想吃早餐嗎？ Tāmen xiǎng chī zǎocān ma?
What?	什麼？ 什麼？ Shénme?
What would they like to eat?	他們想吃什麼？ 他們想吃什么？ Tāmen xiǎng chī shénme?
to order	點 点 diǎn
What would they like to order?	他們想點什麼？ 他們想点什么？ Tāmen xiǎng diǎn shénme?
What would you like to order? (MTOF)	你們想點什麼？ 你們想点什么？ Nǐmen xiǎng diǎn shénme?
Please may I ask? / Please ask?	請問？ 请问？ Qǐng wèn?
Please may I ask, what would you like to order? (MTOF)	請問，你們想點什麼？ 请问，你們想点什么？ Qǐng wèn, nǐmen xiǎng diǎn shénme?
dish / dishes / vegetable	菜 菜 cài
What sort? / What sort of?	什麼？ 什麼？ Shénme?
What sort of dish? / What sort of dishes?	什麼菜？ 什么菜？ Shénme cài?

Please may I ask, what sort of dishes would you like to order?
(MTP)

請問，你們想點什麼菜？
请问，你们想点什么菜？
Qǐng wèn, nǐmen xiǎng diǎn shénme cài?

to do / to make

做
做
zuò

What would they like to do?

他們想做什麼？
他们想做什么？
Tāmen xiǎng zuò shénme?

What would they like to make?

他們想做什麼？
他们想做什么？
Tāmen xiǎng zuò shénme?

They would like to make dinner.

他們想做晚餐。
他们想做晚餐。
Tāmen xiǎng zuò wǎncān.

good / well / okay

好
好
hǎo

very

很
很
hěn

very good / very well

很好
很好
hěn hǎo

Hello.

你好。
你好。
Nǐ hǎo.

How are you?

你好嗎？
你好吗？
Nǐ hǎo ma?

thank you

謝謝
谢谢
xièxie

The present

Very well, thank you.

很好，謝謝。
很好，謝謝。
Hěn hǎo, xièxie.

Is that okay? / Would that be alright?

好不好？
好不好？
Hǎo bù hǎo?

**I would like to order mapo tofu.
Would that be alright?**

我想點麻婆豆腐。好不好？
我想点麻婆豆腐。好不好？
Wǒ xiǎng diǎn mápó dòufu.
Hǎo bù hǎo?

Can - “be allowed to”, “know how to” and “be able to”

**I can / I'm allowed to / It's alright
for me to / It's permissible for me to**

我可以
我可以
Wǒ kěyǐ

to buy

買
买
mǎi

I can buy... / I'm allowed to buy...

我可以買...
我可以买...
Wǒ kěyǐ mǎi...

**What can I buy? / What am I
allowed to buy?**

我可以買什麼？
我可以买什么？
Wǒ kěyǐ mǎi shénme?

one unit

一個
一个
yī gè

**a cell phone / a mobile phone /
one unit mobile phone**

一個手機
一个手机
yī gè shǒujī

**Can I buy a mobile phone? /
Is it alright if I buy a mobile phone?**

我可以買一個手機嗎？
我可以买一个手机吗？
Wǒ kěyǐ mǎi yī gè shǒujī ma?

**Can I buy a mobile phone? / Is it
alright if I buy a mobile phone?**
(shortened version)

我可以買手機嗎？
我可以买手机吗？
Wǒ kěyǐ mǎi shǒujī ma?

NOTE! So, as you learnt during the course, when you're talking about "a" something - a mobile phone, a computer, a car or whatever - you can, if you want, leave the "one unit" part out of the sentence.

new

新
新
xīn

**a new cell phone / a new mobile
phone / one unit new mobile
phone**

一個新的手機
一个新的手机
yī gè xīn de shǒujī

Can I buy a new mobile phone?

我可以買一個新的手機嗎？
我可以买一个新的手机吗？
Wǒ kěyǐ mǎi yī gè xīn de shǒujī ma?

Can I buy a new mobile phone?
(shortened version)

我可以買新的手機嗎？
我可以买新的手机吗？
Wǒ kěyǐ mǎi xīn de shǒujī ma?

a handbag

一個手提包
一个手提包
yī gè shǒutíbāo

**Can I buy a handbag? / Is it alright
if I buy a handbag?**

我可以買一個手提包嗎？
我可以买一个手提包吗？
Wǒ kěyǐ mǎi yī gè shǒutíbāo ma?

**Can I buy a handbag? / Is it alright
if I buy a handbag?**
(shortened version)

我可以買手提包嗎？
我可以买手提包吗？
Wǒ kěyǐ mǎi shǒutíbāo ma?

The present

a new handbag / one unit new handbag

一個新的手提包
一个新的手提包
yī gè xīn de shǒutíbāo

Can I buy a new handbag? / Is it alright if I buy a new handbag?

我可以買一個新的手提包嗎？
我可以买一个的手提包吗？
Wǒ kěyǐ mǎi yī gè xīn de shǒutíbāo ma?

Can I buy a new handbag? / Is it alright if I buy a new handbag?
(shortened version)

我可以買新的手提包嗎？
我可以买新的手提包吗？
Wǒ kěyǐ mǎi xīn de shǒutíbāo ma?

Yes.

可以。
可以。
Kěyǐ.

No.

不可以。
不可以。
Bù kěyǐ.

NOTE! So again, to answer “yes” or “no” to a question in Chinese, we simply need to repeat part of what we’ve been asked. So, if someone asks “**Can** I buy a new handbag?” to answer “yes”, you’ll simply say “**can**”. And, if you want to answer “no”, you’ll simply say “**not can**”. Simple!

to sell

賣
卖
mài

I can sell / I’m allowed to sell

我可以賣
我可以卖
Wǒ kěyǐ mài

your *(talking to one person)*

你的
你的
nǐ de

computer

電腦
电脑
diànnǎo

Can I sell your computer? / Is it alright if I sell your computer?

我可以賣你的電腦嗎？
我可以卖你的电脑吗？
Wǒ kěyǐ mài nǐ de diànnǎo ma?

laptop

手提電腦
手提电脑
shǒutí diànnǎo

Can I sell your laptop? / Am I allowed to sell your laptop? / Is it alright if I sell your laptop?

我可以賣你的手提電腦嗎？
我可以卖你的手提电脑吗？
Wǒ kěyǐ mài nǐ de shǒutí diànnǎo ma?

I can't sell your laptop. / I'm not allowed to sell your laptop.

我不可以賣你的手提電腦。
我不可以卖你的手提电脑。
Wǒ bù kěyǐ mài nǐ de shǒutí diànnǎo.

today

今天
今天
jīntiān

evening

晚上
晚上
wǎnshang

this evening

今天晚上
今天晚上
jīntiān wǎnshang

to use

用
用
yòng

This evening, can they use your laptop?

今天晚上，他們可以用你的手提電腦嗎？
今天晚上，他们可以用你的手提电脑吗？
Jīntiān wǎnshang tāmen kěyǐ yòng nǐ de shǒutí diànnǎo ma?

The present

Can they use your laptop this evening?

他們今天晚上可以用你的手提電腦嗎？

他们今天晚上可以用你的手提电脑吗？

Tāmen jīntiān wǎnshang kěyǐ yòng nǐ de shǒutí diànnǎo ma?

NOTE! The two above sentences carry an identical meaning. However, because the first sentence places the time right at the front, it places more emphasis on **when** they're going to use the laptop. Either way of saying this is perfectly fine, however – but just be aware that moving the time to the very front does place extra emphasis on **when** you're doing it – just as it does when we do the same in English!

my

我的
我的
wǒ de

my laptop

我的手提電腦
我的手提电脑
wǒ de shǒutí diànnǎo

my handbag

我的手提包
我的手提包
wǒ de shǒutíbāo

mum / mom⁴

媽媽
妈妈
māma

my mum

我的媽媽 / 我媽媽
我的妈妈 / 我妈妈
wǒ de māma / wǒ māma

to say / to speak

說
说
shuō

⁴ Another fun British / American language difference here. If you're American and reading this booklet, please be aware that British people spell "mom" as "mum" and this is what I do throughout this booklet. So, if you're from the U.S. please just read all instances of "mum" you find here as "mom"!

my mum speaks / my mum says

我媽媽說
我妈妈说
wǒ māma shuō

**China / Middle Kingdom /
Middle Country**

中國
中国
Zhōngguó

My mum says I can go to China.

我媽媽說我可以去中國。
我妈妈说我可以去中国。
Wǒ māma shuō wǒ kěyǐ qù
Zhōngguó.

**My mum says we can't go to
a restaurant to eat dinner.**

我媽媽說我們不可以去餐廳吃晚餐。
我妈妈说我们不可以去餐厅吃晚餐。
Wǒ māma shuō wǒmen bù kěyǐ qù
cāntīng chī wǎncān.

NOTE! So “kěyǐ” / “可以” is used to mean “can” in Chinese in the sense of what you are allowed to do, what it is alright/permisible/acceptable for you to do. So, it will be used to say things like – “No, you can't go to a nightclub, you're only twelve!” Clearly, you would not allow your child to do such a thing. But it's also used for saying things like “Can we go to a restaurant this evening?” meaning “Would it be alright if we went to a restaurant this evening? Would it be okay for us to do that?” Essentially, therefore, “kěyǐ” / “可以” is there for talking about what we're allowed to do and to ask whether it's permisible or alright to do something. So, “Can I sit here?”, “can I hold your hand?”, “can I order something spicy?” – all of these are “kěyǐ” / “可以”. You'll find that the more often you use it, the more you'll develop a feel for how it works.

roast duck

烤鴨
烤鸭
kǎoyā

Peking duck / Beijing roast duck

北京烤鴨
北京烤鸭
Běijīng kǎoyā

I can / I know how to

我會
我会
Wǒ huì

The present

I can make Peking duck. / I know how to make Peking duck.

我會做北京烤鴨。
我会做北京烤鸭。
Wǒ huì zuò Běijīng kǎoyā.

his

他的
他的
tā de

I can use his computer. / I know how to use his computer.

我會用他的電腦。
我会用他的电脑。
Wǒ huì yòng tā de diànnǎo.

Chinese / Middle Language / Middle Literature

中文
中文
Zhōngwén

I can speak Chinese.

我會說中文。
我会说中文。
Wǒ huì shuō Zhōngwén.

Can you speak Chinese?

你會說中文嗎？
你会说中文吗？
Nǐ huì shuō Zhōngwén ma?

Can you speak Chinese? (MTOPI)

你們會說中文嗎？
你们会说中文吗？
Nǐmen huì shuō Zhōngwén ma?

English

英文
英文
Yīngwén

I can speak English.

我會說英文。
我会说英文。
Wǒ huì shuō Yīngwén.

dad / papa

爸爸
爸爸
bàba

my dad

我的爸爸 / 我爸爸
我的爸爸 / 我爸爸
wǒ de bàba / wǒ bàba

My dad says he can speak English.	我爸爸說他會說英文。 我爸爸说他会说英文。 Wǒ bàba shuō tā huì shuō Yīngwén.
My dad says he can't speak English.	我爸爸說他不會說英文。 我爸爸说他不会说英文。 Wǒ bàba shuō tā bù huì shuō Yīngwén.
but	但是 但是 dànshì
My Dad says he can't speak English but he can speak Chinese.	我爸爸說他不會說英文，但是他會 說中文。 我爸爸说他不会说英文，但是他会 說中文。 Wǒ bàba shuō tā bù huì shuō Yīngwén, dànshì tā huì shuō Zhōngwén.
car	車 车 chē
to operate	開 开 kāi
to drive / to drive car / to operate car	開車 开车 kāi chē
Can you drive? / Do you know how to drive?	你會開車嗎？ 你会开车吗？ Nǐ huì kāi chē ma?
Yes.	會。 会。 Huì.

The present

Yes, I can drive.

會，我會開車。
会，我会开车。
Huì, wǒ huì kāi chē.

No.

不會。
不会。
Bù huì.

No, I can't drive.

不會，我不會開車。
不会，我不会开车。
Bù huì, wǒ bù huì kāi chē.

NOTE! So, “**huì**” / “會” / “会” is used to mean “can” in Chinese in the sense of “know how to” and is really quite easy to master. After all, when you say “I can speak Chinese”, what you really mean is that you know how to speak it - not that someone’s told you you’re allowed to!

I can / I'm (physically) able to

我能
我能
Wǒ néng

**This evening, I can drive. /
This evening, I'm able to drive.**

今天晚上，我能開車。
今天晚上，我能开车。
Jīntiān wǎnshàng, wǒ néng kāi chē.

**This evening, can you drive? /
This evening, are you able
to drive?**

今天晚上，你能開車嗎？
今天晚上，你能开车吗？
Jīntiān wǎnshàng, nǐ néng kāi chē
ma?

**Can you drive this evening? /
Are you able to drive this
evening?**

你今天晚上能開車嗎？
你今天晚上能开车吗？
Nǐ jīntiān wǎnshàng néng kāi chē
ma?

Yes.

能。
能。
Néng.

No.

不能。
不能。
Bù néng.

I can't drive this evening.

我今天晚上不能開車。
我今天晚上不能开车。
Wǒ jīntiān wǎnshàng bù néng kāi chē.

NOTE! So, what does using “néng” / “能” in the above sentences communicate exactly? Well, let's take a look at the last example “I can't drive this evening” – what would this mean precisely? Well, in essence, this would mean that you're not physically able to drive this evening. You might well have a licence, so legally you may be **allowed** to drive and you probably **know how to** drive. However, you're simply not physically able to do so. Perhaps you've been drinking alcohol or maybe you've hurt your wrist. Whatever the exact details, you aren't physically able to do it. And this is what “néng” / “能” is for – to talk about when you are able to do something (because there's nothing physically preventing you from doing it) and when you aren't able to do something (because something is physically preventing you from doing it). Look at the following two examples to understand this even more clearly.

**Can you make dinner this evening? /
Are you able to make dinner this evening?**

你今天晚上能做晚餐嗎？
你今天晚上能做晚餐嗎？
Nǐ jīntiān wǎnshàng néng zuò wǎncān ma?

NOTE! So, in this first example, you are being asked if you are able to make dinner this evening. There are many possible reasons why you may or may not be physically able to do this. For instance, if you were going to be at work then no, you wouldn't be able to make dinner this evening – it would be physically impossible. The same would be true if you'd broken both your arms or if the kitchen door was locked and you didn't have the key. So again, “néng” / “能” means “can” in terms of what it is physically possible for you to do. Let's look at another example:

**Can we use the computers today? /
Are we able to use the computers today?**

我們今天能用電腦嗎？
我们今天能用电脑吗？
Wǒmen jīntiān néng yòng diànnǎo ma?

NOTE! So, in this second example, you've asked “Are we able to use the computers today?” Now, if the computers were already being used by other people then quite possibly no, you wouldn't be able to use them. The same would be true if the computers were broken or if all of them were in a locked room. It would simply not be physically possible for you to use them. So here we can again see how “néng” / “能” is used to mean “can” in the sense of what it is or isn't physically possible to do.

The present

“Kěyǐ”, “Huì”, “Néng” – A quick comparison!

**I can't use the computers. /
I'm not allowed to use the
computers.**

我不可以用電腦。
我不可以用电脑。
Wǒ bù kěyǐ yòng diànnǎo.

NOTE! So, using “kěyǐ” to say “can” here communicates whether or not you're allowed to use the computers – in this instance, you're not!

**I can't use the computers. /
I don't know how to use
the computers.**

我不會用電腦。
我不会用电脑。
Wǒ bù huì yòng diànnǎo.

NOTE! And using “huì” to say “can” here communicates whether you know how to use them – unfortunately, it seems you don't have a clue!

**Today, I can't use the computers. /
Today, I'm not able to use the
computers.**

今天，我不能用電腦。
今天，我不能用电脑。
Jīntiān, wǒ bù néng yòng diànnǎo.

NOTE! And using “néng” to say “can” here tells us about whether you are physically able to use them. Given that you're not able to in this example, it might mean that they're broken or perhaps the door to the room containing them is locked.

Eat, drink, order, ask...

You eat (MTOPI)

你們吃
你们吃
Nǐmen chī

meat

肉
肉
ròu

You eat meat. (MTOPI)

你們吃肉。
你们吃肉。
Nǐmen chī ròu.

Do you eat meat? (MTOF)

你們吃肉嗎？
你们吃肉吗？
Nǐmen chī ròu ma?

We don't eat meat.

我們不吃肉。
我们不吃肉。
Wǒmen bù chī ròu.

drink / to drink

喝
喝
hē

He drinks

他喝
他喝
Tā hē

coffee

咖啡
咖啡
kāfēi

Does he drink coffee?

他喝咖啡嗎？
他喝咖啡吗？
Tā hē kāfēi ma?

sometimes

有時候
有时候
yǒushíhòu

Sometimes, he drinks coffee.

有時候，他喝咖啡。
有时候，他喝咖啡。
Yǒushíhòu, tā hē kāfēi.

He drinks coffee sometimes.

他有時候喝咖啡。
他有时候喝咖啡。
Tā yǒushíhòu hē kāfēi.

water

水
水
shuǐ

He drinks water.

他喝水。
他喝水。
Tā hē shuǐ.

The present

Sometimes, he doesn't drink water. 有時候，他不喝水。
有时候，他不喝水。
Yǒushíhòu, tā bù hē shuǐ.

We go 我們去
我们去
Wǒmen qù

We go to Shanghai. 我們去上海。
我们去上海。
Wǒmen qù Shànghǎi.

Sometimes, we go to Shanghai. 有時候，我們去上海。
有时候，我们去上海。
Yǒushíhòu, wǒmen qù Shànghǎi.

to ask 問
问
wèn

I ask 我問
我问
Wǒ wèn

question / questions 問題
问题
wèntí

Sometimes, I ask questions. 有時候，我問問題。
有时候，我问问题。
Yǒushíhòu, wǒ wèn wèntí.

I don't ask 我不問
我不问
Wǒ bù wèn

Sometimes, I don't ask questions 有時候，我不問問題。
有时候，我不问问题。
Yǒushíhòu, wǒ bù wèn wèntí.

I make 我做
我做
Wǒ zuò

sweet and sour pork

咕嚕肉
咕嚕肉
gūlū ròu

Sometimes, I make sweet and sour pork.

有時候，我做咕嚕肉。
有时候，我做咕嚕肉。
Yǒushíhòu, wǒ zuò gūlū ròu.

to have

有
有
yǒu

a question / one unit question

一個問題
一个问题
yī gè wèntí

I have a question.

我有一個問題。
我有一个问题。
Wǒ yǒu yī gè wèntí.

I don't have questions.

我沒有問題。
我没有问题。
Wǒ méi yǒu wèntí.

The present - with “zai”

located in

在
在
zài

I eat

我吃
我吃
Wǒ chī

I am eating / I am located in the process of eating / I located in eat

我在吃
我在吃
Wǒ zài chī

I'm eating special fried rice. / I'm located in eating special fried rice.

我在吃揚州炒飯。
我在吃扬州炒饭。
Wǒ zài chī Yángzhōu chǎo fàn.

The present

I'm eating sweet and sour pork.

我在吃咕嚕肉。
我在吃咕嚕肉。
Wǒ zài chī gūlū ròu.

I'm drinking / I'm located in the process of drinking

我在喝
我在喝
Wǒ zài hē

oolong tea

烏龍茶
乌龙茶
wūlóng chá

I'm drinking oolong tea.

我在喝烏龍茶。
我在喝乌龙茶。
Wǒ zài hē wūlóng chá.

jasmine tea / jasmine flower tea

茉莉花茶
茉莉花茶
mòlihuā chá

I'm drinking jasmine tea.

我在喝茉莉花茶。
我在喝茉莉花茶。
Wǒ zài hē mòlihuā chá.

I'm doing / I'm making

我在做
我在做
Wǒ zài zuò

They're doing / They're making

他們在做
他們在做
Tāmen zài zuò

What are they doing?

他們在做什麼？
他們在做什么？
Tāmen zài zuò shénme?

They're drinking jasmine tea.

他們在喝茉莉花茶。
他們在喝茉莉花茶。
Tāmen zài hē mòlihuā chá.

Are they drinking jasmine tea?

他們在喝茉莉花茶嗎？
他們在喝茉莉花茶嗎？
Tāmen zài hē mòlihuā chá ma?

**What are you making? /
You're making what?**

你在做什麼？
你在做什么？
Nǐ zài zuò shénme?

I'm making sweet and sour pork.

我在做咕嚕肉。
我在做咕嚕肉。
Wǒ zài zuò gūlū ròu.

**What are you doing? /
You're doing what?**

你在做什麼？
你在做什么？
Nǐ zài zuò shénme?

I'm eating breakfast.

我在吃早餐。
我在吃早餐。
Wǒ zài chī zǎocān.

I'm saying / speaking

我在說
我在說
Wǒ zài shuō

You're saying / You're speaking

你在說
你在說
Nǐ zài shuō

**What are you saying? / What are
you speaking?**

你在說什麼？
你在说什么？
Nǐ zài shuō shénme?

I'm speaking Chinese.

我在說中文。
我在說中文。
Wǒ zài shuō Zhōngwén.

She's speaking Chinese.

她在說中文。
她在說中文。
Tā zài shuō Zhōngwén.

She's speaking English.

她在說英文。
她在說英文。
Tā zài shuō Yīngwén.

Is she speaking English?

她在說英文嗎？
她在說英文嗎？
Tā zài shuō Yīngwén ma?

The present

I use

我用
我用
Wǒ yòng

I'm using

我在用
我在用
Wǒ zài yòng

You're using

你在用
你在用
Nǐ zài yòng

You're using his computer.

你在用他的電腦。
你在用他的电脑。
Nǐ zài yòng tā de diànnǎo.

Are you using his computer?

你在用他的電腦嗎？
你在用他的电脑吗？
Nǐ zài yòng tā de diànnǎo ma?

The past

Talking about the past with “le”

I go	我去 我去 Wǒ qù
I went	我去了 我去了 Wǒ qù le
He went	他去了 他去了 Tā qù le
They went	他們去了 他们去了 Tāmen qù le
They went to China.	他們去了中國。 他们去了中国。 Tāmen qù le Zhōngguó.
Chinatown	中國城 中国城 Zhōngguóchéng
They went to Chinatown.	他們去了中國城。 他们去了中国城。 Tāmen qù le Zhōngguóchéng.
I eat	我吃 我吃 Wǒ chī
We eat	我們吃 我们吃 Wǒmen chī

The past

We ate

我們吃了
我们吃了
Wǒmen chī le

We ate special fried rice and sweet and sour pork.

我們吃了揚州炒飯和咕嚕肉。
我们吃了扬州炒饭和咕嚕肉。
Wǒmen chī le Yángzhōu chǎo fàn
hé gūlū ròu.

She asks

她問
她问
Tā wèn

She asked

她問了
她问了
Tā wèn le

She asked questions.

她問了問題。
她问了问题。
Tā wèn le wèntí.

You drink (MTOPI)

你們喝
你们喝
Nǐmen hē

You drank (MTOPI)

你們喝了
你们喝了
Nǐmen hē le

You drank coffee. (MTOPI)

你們喝了咖啡。
你们喝了咖啡。
Nǐmen hē le kāfēi.

Did you drink coffee? / You drank coffee ma? (MTOPI)

你們喝了咖啡嗎？
你们喝了咖啡吗？
Nǐmen hē le kāfēi ma?

Yes.

喝了。
喝了。
Hē le.

No.

沒有。
没有。
Méi yǒu.

NOTE! As before, to answer “yes” here, we once more simply repeat part of what we’ve been asked. So, if someone asks “You **drank** coffee ma?” to answer “yes”, you’ll simply say “**drank**”. To answer “no” to any question about the past, however, you will just reply “**not have**” (“méi yǒu”).

You drank his coffee but he ate your fried rice.

你喝了他的咖啡，但是他吃了你的炒飯。
你喝了他的咖啡，但是他吃了你的炒飯。
Nǐ hē le tā de kāfēi, dànshì tā chī le nǐ de chǎo fàn.

I order

我點
我点
Wǒ diǎn

I ordered

我點了
我点了
Wǒ diǎn le

I ordered dinner.

我點了晚餐。
我点了晚餐。
Wǒ diǎn le wǎncān.

She ordered mapo tofu.

她點了麻婆豆腐。
她点了麻婆豆腐。
Tā diǎn le mápó dòufu.

She ordered tea.

她點了茶。
她点了茶。
Tā diǎn le chá.

Did she order tea?

她點了茶嗎？
她点了茶吗？
Tā diǎn le chá ma?

Yes.

點了。
点了。
Diǎn le.

The past

No.

沒有。
没有。
Méi yǒu.

yesterday

昨天
昨天
zuótiān

**Yesterday, did you go to Beijing? /
Yesterday, you went to Beijing ma?**

昨天，你去了北京嗎？
昨天，你去了北京吗？
Zuótiān, nǐ qù le Běijīng ma?

You use

你用
你用
Nǐ yòng

You used

你用了
你用了
Nǐ yòng le

our

我們的
我们的
wǒmen de

You used our car yesterday.

你昨天用了我們的車。
你昨天用了我们的车。
Nǐ zuótiān yòng le wǒmen de chē.

Did you use our car yesterday?

你昨天用了我們的車嗎？
你昨天用了我们的车吗？
Nǐ zuótiān yòng le wǒmen de chē
ma?

She used our computers yesterday.

她昨天用了我們的電腦。
她昨天用了我们的电脑。
Tā zuótiān yòng le wǒmen de
diànnǎo.

yesterday evening

昨天晚上
昨天晚上
zuótiān wǎnshàng

her

她的
她的
tā de

I used her mobile phone yesterday evening.

我昨天晚上用了她的手機。
我昨天晚上用了她的手機。
Wǒ zuótiān wǎnshang yòng le tā de shǒujī.

their (male) / their (female)

他們的 / 她們的
他們的 / 她們的
tāmen de

I ate their mapo tofu yesterday evening.

我昨天晚上吃了他們的麻婆豆腐。
我昨天晚上吃了他們的麻婆豆腐。
Wǒ zuótiān wǎnshang chī le tāmen de mápó dòufu.

a little (Southern)

一點
一点
yī diǎn

I drank a little coffee yesterday evening. (Southern)

我昨天晚上喝了一點咖啡。
我昨天晚上喝了一点咖啡。
Wǒ zuótiān wǎnshang hē le yī diǎn kāfēi.

a little (Northern)

一點兒
一点儿
yī diǎnr

I drank a little coffee yesterday evening. (Northern)

我昨天晚上喝了一點兒咖啡。
我昨天晚上喝了一点儿咖啡。
Wǒ zuótiān wǎnshang hē le yī diǎnr kāfēi.

I buy

我買
我买
Wǒ mǎi

I bought

我買了
我买了
Wǒ mǎi le

The past

I bought a good mobile phone.

我買了一個好的手機。
我买了一个好的手机。
Wǒ mǎile yī gè hǎo de shǒujī.

She bought a good mobile phone yesterday evening.

她昨天晚上買了一個好的手機。
她昨天晚上买了一个好的手机。
Tā zuótiān wǎnshang mǎi le yī gè hǎo de shǒujī.

morning / early on

早上
早上
zǎoshang

this morning / today morning

今天早上
今天早上
jīntiān zǎoshang

This morning, they made Peking duck.

今天早上，他們做了北京烤鴨。
今天早上，他们做了北京烤鸭。
Jīntiān zǎoshang, tāmen zuò le Běijīng kǎoyā.

They made Peking Duck this morning.

他們今天早上做了北京烤鴨。
他们今天早上做了北京烤鸭。
Tāmen jīntiān zǎoshang zuò le Běijīng kǎoyā.

I sell

我賣
我卖
Wǒ mài

I sold

我賣了
我卖了
Wǒ mài le

a computer / one surface unit computer

一台電腦
一台电脑
yī tái diànnǎo

This morning, I sold a computer.

今天早上，我賣了一台電腦。
今天早上，我卖了一台电脑。
Jīntiān zǎoshang, wǒ mài le yī tái diànnǎo.

I sold a computer this morning.

我今天早上賣了一台電腦。
我今天早上賣了一台電腦。
Wǒ jīntiān zǎoshang mài le yī tái diànnǎo.

a laptop / one surface unit laptop

一台手提電腦
一台手提电脑
yī tái shǒutí diànnǎo

He sold a laptop this morning.

他今天早上賣了一台手提電腦。
他今天早上賣了一台手提电脑。
Tā jīntiān zǎoshang mài le yī tái shǒutí diànnǎo.

yesterday morning

昨天早上
昨天早上
zuótiān zǎoshang

I went to Yangzhou yesterday morning.

我昨天早上去了揚州。
我昨天早上去了揚州。
Wǒ zuótiān zǎoshang qù le Yángzhōu.

I went to Chinatown yesterday morning.

我昨天早上去了中國城。
我昨天早上去了中國城。
Wǒ zuótiān zǎoshang qù le Zhōngguóchéng.

What did you buy yesterday morning?

你昨天早上買了什麼？
你昨天早上買了什麼？
Nǐ zuótiān zǎoshang mǎi le shénme?

I bought a little jasmine tea yesterday morning. (Southern)

我昨天早上買了一點茉莉花茶。
我昨天早上買了一點茉莉花茶。
Wǒ zuótiān zǎoshang mǎi le yī diǎn mòlihuā chá.

I bought a little jasmine tea yesterday morning. (Northern)

我昨天早上買了一點兒茉莉花茶。
我昨天早上買了一點兒茉莉花茶。
Wǒ zuótiān zǎoshang mǎi le yī diǎnr mòlihuā chá.

The past

I used

我用了
我用了
Wǒ yòng le

I didn't use

我沒有用
我沒有用
Wǒ méi yǒu yòng.

NOTE! When talking about the past in a negative sense, use “méi yǒu” / “沒有” – never “bù” / “不” – so, “I didn't use” in Chinese is literally “I have not use”, “I didn't go” is “I have not go”, and so on.

**I didn't use your mobile phone
yesterday morning.**

我昨天早上沒有用你的手機。
我昨天早上沒有用你的手机。
Wǒ zuótiān zǎoshang méi yǒu
yòng nǐ de shǒujī.

white rice / plain rice

白飯
白飯
bái fàn

Did you order plain rice?

你點了白飯嗎？
你点了白饭吗？
Nǐ diǎn le bái fàn ma?

No, I didn't order plain rice.

沒有，我沒有點白飯。
没有，我没有点白饭。
Méi yǒu, wǒ méi yǒu diǎn bái fàn.

I bought

我買了
我买了
Wǒ mǎi le

I didn't buy

我沒有買
我没有买
Wǒ méi yǒu mǎi

**I didn't buy a new handbag
yesterday.**

我昨天沒有買一個新的手提包。
我昨天没有买一个新的手提包。
Wǒ zuótiān méi yǒu mǎi yī gè xīn
de shǒutíbāo.

**I didn't buy a new handbag
yesterday.** (*shortened*)

我昨天沒有買新的手提包。
我昨天沒有買新的手提包。
Wǒ zuótiān méi yǒu mǎi xīn de
shǒutíbāo.

I made

我做了
我做了
Wǒ zuò le

I didn't make

我沒有做
我沒有做
Wǒ méi yǒu zuò

steamed bun / steamed buns

包子
包子
bāozi

**I didn't make steamed buns
yesterday evening.**

我昨天晚上沒有做包子。
我昨天晚上沒有做包子。
Wǒ zuótiān wǎnshang méi yǒu
zuò bāozi.

meat steamed buns

肉包子
肉包子
ròu bāozi

**I didn't make meat steamed buns
yesterday evening.**

我昨天晚上沒有做肉包子。
我昨天晚上沒有做肉包子。
Wǒ zuótiān wǎnshang méi yǒu
zuò ròu bāozi.

vegetable steamed buns

菜包子
菜包子
cài bāozi

**I didn't make vegetable steamed
buns yesterday evening.**

我昨天晚上沒有做菜包子。
我昨天晚上沒有做菜包子。
Wǒ zuótiān wǎnshang méi yǒu
zuò cài bāozi.

bread

麵包
面包
miànbāo

The past

I didn't make bread yesterday evening.

我昨天晚上沒有做麵包。
我昨天晚上没有做面包。
Wǒ zuótiān wǎnshang méi yǒu zuò miànbāo.

I went

我去了
我去了
Wǒ qù le

I didn't go

我沒有去
我没有去
Wǒ méi yǒu qù

I didn't go to China.

我沒有去中國。
我没有去中国。
Wǒ méi yǒu qù Zhōngguó.

this year

今年
今年
jīnnián

I didn't go to China this year.

我今年沒有去中國。
我今年没有去中国。
Wǒ jīnnián méi yǒu qù Zhōngguó.

They didn't go to China this year.

他們今年沒有去中國。
他们今年没有去中国。
Tāmen jīnnián méi yǒu qù Zhōngguó.

Didn't they go to China this year?

他們今年沒有去中國嗎？
他们今年没有去中国吗？
Tāmen jīnnián méi yǒu qù Zhōngguó ma?

last year

去年
去年
qùnián

Tiananmen / The Heavenly Peace Gate

天安門
天安门
Tiān'ānmén

I didn't go to Tiananmen last year.

我去年沒有去天安門。
我去年没有去天安门。
Wǒ qùnián méi yǒu qù
Tiān'ānmén.

**I went to Beijing last year but
I didn't go to Tiananmen.**

我去年去了北京，但是我沒有去天安門。
我去年去了北京，但是我沒有去天安门。
Wǒ qùnián qù le Běijīng, dànshì
wǒ méi yǒu qù Tiān'ānmén.

**I didn't buy a new computer
last year.**

我去年沒有買一台新的電腦。
我去年没有买一台新的电脑。
Wǒ qùnián méi yǒu mǎi yī tái xīn
de diànnǎo.

**I didn't buy a new computer
last year. (shortened version)**

我去年沒有買新的電腦。
我去年没有买新的电脑。
Wǒ qùnián méi yǒu mǎi xīn de
diànnǎo.

The Past with “guo”

I go

我去
我去
Wǒ qù

I went

我去了
我去了
Wǒ qù le

I have gone (before)

我去過
我去过
Wǒ qù guo

**they've gone (before) /
they've been (before)**

他們去過
他们去過
Tāmen qù guo

The past

They've gone to Tiananmen (before). / **They've been to Tiananmen (before).**
他們去過天安門。
他们去過天安门。
Tāmen qù guo Tiān'ānmén.

I have made Peking duck (before).
我做過北京烤鴨。
我做过北京烤鸭。
Wǒ zuò guo Běijīng kǎoyā.

I have used their car (before).
我用過他們的車。
我用过他们的车。
Wǒ yòng guo tāmen de chē.

I have ordered mapo tofu (before).
我點過麻婆豆腐。
我点过麻婆豆腐。
Wǒ diǎn guo mápó dòufu.

I have eaten steamed buns before.
我吃過包子。
我吃过包子。
Wǒ chī guo bāozi.

I haven't eaten steamed buns before.
我沒有吃過包子。
我没有吃过包子。
Wǒ méi yǒu chī guo bāozi.

I have made bread before.
我做過麵包。
我做过面包。
Wǒ zuò guo miànbāo.

I haven't made bread before.
我沒有做過麵包。
我没有做过面包。
Wǒ méi yǒu zuò guo miànbāo.

to operate (*something*)
開
开
kāi

I operate
我開
我开
Wǒ kāi

I've operated (before)
我開過
我开过
Wǒ kāi guo

**I've driven before. /
I've operated before car.**

我開過車。
我开过车。
Wǒ kāi guo chē.

**You've driven before. /
You've operated before car.**

你開過車。
你开过车。
Nǐ kāi guo chē.

Have you driven before?

你開過車嗎？
你开过车吗？
Nǐ kāi guo chē ma?

Has she driven before?

她開過車嗎？
她开过车吗？
Tā kāi guo chē ma?

I haven't driven before.

我沒有開過車。
我没有开过车。
Wǒ méi yǒu kāi guo chē.

I've driven his car before.

我開過他的車。
我开过他的车。
Wǒ kāi guo tā de chē.

I haven't driven his car before.

我沒有開過他的車。
我没有开过他的车。
Wǒ méi yǒu kāi guo tā de chē.

You've sold computers (before).

賣過電腦。
你卖过电脑。
Nǐ mài guo diànnǎo.

Have you sold computers (before)?

你賣過電腦嗎？
你卖过电脑吗？
Nǐ mài guo diànnǎo ma?

Yes.

賣過。
卖过。
Mài guo.

No.

沒有。
没有。
Méi yǒu.

The past

NOTE! So again, to answer “yes” here we once more simply repeat part of what we’ve been asked. So, if someone asks “You **have sold** computers (before) ma?” to answer “yes”, you’ll simply say “**have sold**” (“mài guo”). To answer “no” to any question about the past, however, you simply reply “**not have**” (“méi yǒu”).

Have you bought their Peking duck (before)?

你買過他們的北京烤鴨嗎？
你买过他们的北京烤鸭吗？
Nǐ mǎi guo tāmen de Běijīng kǎoyā ma?

Yes.

買過。
买过。
Mǎi guo.

No.

沒有。
没有。
Méi yǒu.

big

大
大
dà

Chinese leaf / napa cabbage / wombok

大白菜
大白菜
dàbáicài

Have you eaten Chinese leaf (before)?

你吃過大白菜嗎？
你吃过大白菜吗？
Nǐ chī guo dàbáicài ma?

Yes.

吃過。
吃过。
Chī guo.

No.

沒有。
没有。
Méi yǒu.

**I have eaten Chinese leaf (before)
but she hasn't.**

我吃過大白菜，但是她沒有。
我吃过大白菜，但是她没有。
Wǒ chī guo dàbáicài, dànshì tā
méi yǒu.

**Please may I ask, have you been /
gone to China (before)?**

請問，你去過中國嗎？
请问，你去过中国吗？
Qǐngwèn, nǐ qù guo Zhōngguó ma?

Yes.

去過。
去过。
Qù guo.

No.

沒有。
没有。
Méi yǒu.

**I have been to Chinatown, but
I haven't been to China.**

我去過中國城，但是我沒有去過中國。
我去过中国城，但是我没有去过中国。
Wǒ qù guo Zhōngguóchéng,
dànshì wǒ méi yǒu qù guo
Zhōngguó.

The future

Talking about the future using just a time reference

The easiest way to talk about the future in Chinese is to simply add a future time reference when talking in the present.

I go

我去
我去
Wǒ qù

This evening, I go to Chinatown.

今天晚上，我去中國城。
今天晚上，我去中国城。
Jīntiān wǎnshàng, wǒ qù
Zhōngguóchéng.

I make

我做
我做
Wǒ zuò

I make sweet and sour pork this evening. / I'll make sweet and sour pork this evening.

我今天晚上做咕嚕肉。
我今天晚上做咕嚕肉。
Wǒ jīntiān wǎnshàng zuò gūlū ròu.

I use

我用
我用
Wǒ yòng

your (MTOF)

你們的
你们的
nǐmen de

I use your car this evening. / I'll use your car this evening. (MTOF)

我今天晚上用你們的車。
我今天晚上用你们的车。
Wǒ jīntiān wǎnshàng yòng nǐmen
de chē.

I don't use

我不用
我不用
Wǒ bù yòng

I don't use your car this evening. / I won't use your car this evening. (M TOP)

我今天晚上不用你們的車。
我今天晚上不用你們的車。
Wǒ jīntiān wǎnshàng bù yòng
nǐmen de chē.

I don't make

我不做
我不做
Wǒ bù zuò

I don't make sweet and sour pork this evening. / I'm not going to make sweet and sour pork this evening.

我今天晚上不做咕嚕肉。
我今天晚上不做咕嚕肉。
Wǒ jīntiān wǎnshàng bù zuò gūlū
ròu.

The future - using “yào”

The other way to talk about the future in Chinese is to use a future time reference along with the Chinese word for “want” – “yào”.

I want

我要
我要
Wǒ yào

I'm going to make special fried rice this evening. / I'll make special fried rice this evening.⁵

我今天晚上要做揚州炒飯。
我今天晚上要做揚州炒飯。
Wǒ jīntiān wǎnshàng yào zuò
Yángzhōu chǎo fàn.

tomorrow

明天
明天
míngtiān

I'm going to make special fried rice tomorrow. / I'll make special fried rice tomorrow.

我明天要做揚州炒飯。
我明天要做揚州炒飯。
Wǒ míngtiān yào zuò Yángzhōu
chǎo fàn.

⁵ In English, we typically talk about the future using “will” and “going to”; I have used both to translate these Chinese sentences into English. You can think of these Chinese sentences as having either / both meanings.

The future

You're going to make special fried rice tomorrow. / You'll make special fried rice tomorrow.

你明天要做揚州炒飯。
你明天要做扬州炒饭。
Nǐ míngtiān yào zuò Yángzhōu chǎo fàn.

Are you going to make special fried rice tomorrow? / Will you make special fried rice tomorrow?

你明天要做揚州炒飯嗎？
你明天要做扬州炒饭吗？
Nǐ míngtiān yào zuò Yángzhōu chǎo fàn ma?

I'm going to go to Chinatown tomorrow. / I'll go to Chinatown tomorrow.

我明天要去中國城。
我明天要去中国城。
Wǒ míngtiān yào qù Zhōngguóchéng.

I'm going to go to Chinatown tomorrow evening. / I'll go to Chinatown tomorrow evening.

我明天晚上要去中國城。
我明天晚上要去中国城。
Wǒ míngtiān wǎnshàng yào qù Zhōngguóchéng.

We're going to go to Chinatown tomorrow evening. / We'll go to Chinatown tomorrow evening.

我們明天晚上要去中國城。
我们明天晚上要去中国城。
Wǒmen míngtiān wǎnshàng yào qù Zhōngguóchéng.

Are we going to go to Chinatown tomorrow evening? / Will we go to Chinatown tomorrow evening?

我們明天晚上要去中國城嗎？
我们明天晚上要去中国城吗？
Wǒmen míngtiān wǎnshàng yào qù Zhōngguóchéng ma?

I'm going to buy a new mobile phone tomorrow. / I'll buy a new mobile phone tomorrow.

我明天要買一個新的手機。
我明天要买一个新的手机。
Wǒ míngtiān yào mǎi yī gè xīn de shǒujī.

I'm going to buy a new mobile phone tomorrow. (shortened)

我明天要買新的手機。
我明天要买新的手机。
Wǒ míngtiān yào mǎi xīn de shǒujī.

next year

明年
明年
míngnián

**I'm going to go to China next year. /
I'll go to China next year.**

我明年要去中國。
我明年要去中国。
Wǒ míngnián yào qù Zhōngguó.

**I'm going to sell my car next year. /
I'll sell my car next year.**

我明年要賣我的車。
我明年要卖我的车。
Wǒ míngnián yào mài wǒ de chē.

wheeled unit

輛
輛
liàng

one car / one wheeled unit car

一輛車
一辆车
yī liàng chē

**I'm going to buy a car next year. /
I'll buy a car next year.**

我明年要買一輛車。
我明年要买一辆车。
Wǒ míngnián yào mǎi yī liàng chē.

I'm going to buy a car next year.
(shortened)

我明年要買車。
我明年要买车。
Wǒ míngnián yào mǎi chē.

a couple of

兩
两
liǎng

**a couple of wheeled unit cars /
two cars**

兩輛車
两辆车
liǎng liàng chē

**He is going to buy two cars next
year. / He is going to buy a
couple of wheeled unit cars
next year.**

他明年要買兩輛車。
他明年要买两辆车。
Tā míngnián yào mǎi liǎng liàng
chē.

a couple of surface units

兩台
两台
liǎng tái

The future

**a couple of surface unit computers /
two computers**

兩台電腦
两台电脑
liǎng tái diànnǎo

two new computers

兩台新的電腦
两台新的电脑
liǎng tái xīn de diànnǎo

**He is going to buy two new
computers next year. / He'll buy
two new computers next year.**

他明年要買兩台新的電腦。
他明年要买两台新的电脑。
Tā míngnián yào mǎi liǎng tái xīn
de diànnǎo.

**He's going to sell his car this year. /
He'll sell his car this year.**

他今年要賣他的車。
他今年要卖他的车。
Tā jīnnián yào mài tā de chē.

The Tones in Mandarin Chinese

1st Tone The Doctor's Tone

When you're at the doctor's and the doctor wants to look in your mouth, he'll tell you to: "just say 'aaaaah'". This is the first tone in Chinese, high and flat, just like that "aaaaah" sound.

2nd Tone The Person Upstairs's Tone

You know how, when you're upstairs or a little too far away to hear someone clearly and they call your name. And you say "yeah?" This is the second tone in Chinese. It's a rising tone, the same type of tone you use when you raise your voice at the end of a sentence to turn it into a question.

3rd Tone The Exasperated Teacher's Tone

Think about a teacher, standing at the front of a class, giving a long explanation. Or at least she's trying to give a long explanation. However, one of her students keeps raising their hand to ask questions. This is quite exasperating for the teacher. You can tell this by her response when she's interrupted for the third time. Pausing in her explanation yet again, and looking over at the student, she says: "Yes?" in an exasperated tone. This is the third tone in Chinese, a falling rising tone.

4th Tone The Dog Owner's Tone

People with dogs tend to either be telling them off or giving them instructions all the time. They say things like "no!" and "sit!" This is the fourth tone in Chinese, a downward, falling tone – the dog owner's tone that they use when telling their dog what to do. Try it now. Say "sit!"

Neutral Tone The Pathetic Non-tone Tone

Well, what can I say? Sometimes known as the fifth tone, sometimes as the neutral tone, this is simply something of a damp squib. Any Chinese word or part of a word without a tone mark above it is a neutral tone, which simply means that you just touch it without any particular emphasis. There's no strength to it. It's pathetic...

Learning the tones – the Cluster Method

Having listened through the entire audio course, you now know what the tones in Chinese sound like – and you have had multiple opportunities to imitate the pronunciation of our two native speakers each time you’ve spoken.

This means that you should now be able to make yourself understood when speaking in sentences in Chinese. However, if you want to improve your pronunciation still further and become an advanced speaker of Chinese, so that you know with certainty what the tone is for any given word you’ve learned, then you should use the “Cluster Method” I have devised for you below in order to do this.

How the Cluster Method works

The way it works is very simple. I’ve divided the Chinese words you’ve learned into small groups (my “clusters”) and I’ve done this in such a way that what you learn in one cluster should help you with what follows in the next one – you’ll see what I mean once you get started.

Now the first thing I want you to do in order to use this method is to **cover up the Chinese words in the right-hand column** of Cluster Number One below and then read the English word in the left-hand column of that cluster. Do this now!

Cluster Number One

Read me	Cover me (while you think)
Northern	Běi / 北

And now, having read that English word (Northern), what I want you to do is:

1. Translate that word into Chinese.

And

2. Say out loud what you think the tone of that word is in Chinese (i.e. first, second, third, fourth, neutral).

Don't worry if you find that you guess the tone wrong – you will do this often at first and this is what the Cluster Method is designed to fix.

So, just to make this clear, I want you to try to translate “Northern” into Chinese *and* say out loud what tone you think that word is (first, second, third, fourth or neutral). Do that now!

So, have you done that? Good. Now uncover the Chinese in the right-hand column and check if you got both the word *and* its tone correct.

Did you manage it? If not, cover the Chinese up and try again – you'll surely get it right this time though, as you've only just looked at it.

Once you are able to correctly give the answer as “**Běi** – third tone” you can then move on to the next word in the cluster. Here it is:

Read me

Cover me (while you think)

Capital

Jīng / 京

So now, just as before, cover up the Chinese, look at the English word on the left (“Capital”) and see if you can recall how to say that in Chinese – and remember, of course, to also say out loud the tone you think that word is. Do that now!

Did you get it right? If not, cover it again and try again – just as before, you'll surely get it right the second time, as you've only just looked at it.

Now, having got to the point where you've got the first two words in the cluster correct, you can move on to the final word in Cluster Number One – “Beijing.” **So, once again, you should look at the English version of this word, cover the Chinese (make sure not to look at it – no cheating!) and then you should not only translate it into Chinese but also state what the correct tones are for it.** Do that now!

Read me

Cover me (while you think)

Beijing / Northern Capital

Běijīng / 北京

Good. If you got that third word correct – including stating the correct tones for it – then that means you have now finished your first cluster. And it should be clear to you already how learning the first two words and their tones helped you learn the third word and its tones. So, giving the correct answer for that third word as: “**Běijīng** – third tone, first tone” should have been fairly easy for you.

Learning the tones – the Cluster Method

This then is how the Cluster Method works. What you learn first helps you with what comes next. And, in fact, what you just learnt in that first cluster is now about to help you in the second.

So, remembering to cover the right-hand column and to follow the *exact same method* as set out above, work your way through Cluster Number Two below, until you can get each word and tone correct. Go to it!

(By the way, make sure to work your way through each cluster in the order given – don't skip any words or do them in a different order. So, for example, make sure you can translate and give the correct tone for the first word in a cluster before moving on to the second and so on).

Cluster Number Two

South / Southern	Nán / 南
Nanjing / Southern capital	Nánjīng / 南京

Excellent! So, you've now worked your way through this second cluster of words until you can translate each of them correctly and give the correct tones for each word.

Did you notice how you already knew “**Jīng**” / “京” from the previous cluster? Well, this is the beauty of the Cluster Method, as, wherever possible, what you learn in one cluster will then be used to help you in the next one.

Now, before you go on to Cluster Number Three, what I want you to do is to go back to Cluster Number One and work through it again. This step is crucial to the Cluster Method and *must not be skipped*.

And, once you've correctly translated and given the correct tones for each word in that first cluster, you must then come back here and do Cluster Number Two again.

So, go back over Cluster Number One *and* Cluster Number Two before going on to Cluster Number Three – this is essential!

Once you've done that, you can, of course, go on to Cluster Number Three below.

Cluster Number Three

Roast	Kǎo / 烤
Duck	Yā / 鴨 / 鴨 ⁶
Roast duck	Kǎoyā / 烤鴨 / 烤鸭
Peking duck / Beijing roast duck	Běijīng kǎoyā / 北京烤鴨 / 北京烤鸭

Tremendous! You've now worked your way through your third cluster of words and are able not only to translate them correctly but again also to give the correct tones for each.

Now, as before, before you go on to Cluster Number Four, I want you to go back to Cluster Number One and work through it again, and then do the same with Cluster Number Two and Cluster Number Three. Once you've done that – and got everything correct for each of those clusters – you can then go on to Cluster Number Four.

Cluster Number Four

Middle	Zhōng / 中
Country / Kingdom	Guó / 國 / 国
China / Middle country / Middle Kingdom	Zhōngguó / 中國 / 中国
Fortified wall / Walled in	Chéng / 城
Chinatown	Zhōngguóchéng / 中國城 / 中国城

Well, you should know the drill by now. If you've managed to get everything in this cluster correct, go back and work through all the previous clusters, plus this one, and only then should you go on to Cluster Number Five.

⁶ For the clusters, both traditional and simplified characters are only given when they differ from one another.

Cluster Number Five

Literature / Language	Wén / 文
Chinese / Middle literature / Middle Language	Zhōngwén / 中文
Eng (as in “English”)	Yīng / 英
English	Yīngwén / 英文

As before, go back again now and review all the previous clusters, plus this one, before moving on to the next.

Cluster Number Six

Fried	Chǎo / 炒
Noodles / Wheat product	Miàn / 麵 / 面
Fried noodles	Chǎo miàn / 炒麵 / 炒面
Rice	Fàn / 飯 / 饭
Fried rice	Chǎo fàn / 炒飯 / 炒饭
Yangzhou	Yángzhōu / 揚州 / 扬州
Special fried rice / House fried rice / Yangzhou fried rice	Yángzhōu chǎo fàn / 揚州炒飯 / 扬州炒饭

Again, don't forget to review all the previous clusters, including this one, before moving on to the next. You must do this after every cluster you complete, otherwise the process will not work!

Cluster Number Seven

White	Bái / 白
Plain rice / White rice	Bái fàn / 白飯 / 白饭
Big	Dà / 大
Vegetable / Dish	Cài / 菜
Chinese Leaf / Napa cabbage / Wombok / Big white vegetable	Dàbáicài / 大白菜

Cluster Number Eight

Hand	Shǒu / 手
Machine	Jī / 機 / 机
Mobile phone / Cell phone / Hand machine	Shǒujī / 手機 / 手机
Bag	Bāo / 包
To lift	Tí / 提
Handbag / Hand lift bag	Shǒutíbāo / 手提包

Cluster Number Nine

Bread / Wheat-product bag	Miànbāo / 麵包 / 面包
Steamed bun	Bāozi / 包子
Vegetable steamed bun	Cài bāozi / 菜包子
Meat	Ròu / 肉
Meat steamed bun	Ròu bāozi / 肉包子

Cluster Number Ten

Sweet and sour pork / Rumbly stomach meat	Gūlū ròu / 咕嚕肉
Tofu	Dòufu / 豆腐
Mapo tofu	Mápó dòufu / 麻婆豆腐

Cluster Number Eleven

Dot / Point / To order	Diǎn / 點 / 点
Electric	Diàn / 電 / 电
Brain	Nǎo / 腦 / 脑
Computer / Electric brain	Diànnǎo / 電腦 / 电脑
Laptop / Hand lift electric brain	Shǒutí diànnǎo / 手提電腦 / 手提电脑

Cluster Number Twelve

Day / Heaven / Heavenly	Tiān / 天
Peace	Ān / 安
Gate / Door	Mén / 門 / 门
The Heavenly Peace Gate	Tiān'ānmén / 天安門 / 天安门

Cluster Number Thirteen

Yesterday	Zuótiān / 昨天
Today	Jīntiān / 今天
Tomorrow	Míngtiān / 明天

Cluster Number Fourteen

Year	Nián / 年
To go	Qù / 去
Last year	Qùnián / 去年
This year	Jīnnián / 今年
Next year	Míngnián / 明年

Cluster Number Fifteen

I	Wǒ / 我
We	Wǒmen / 我們 / 我们
My	Wǒ de / 我的
Our	Wǒmen de / 我們的 / 我们的

Cluster Number Sixteen

You (<i>one person</i>)	Nǐ / 你
You (<i>MTOP</i>)	Nǐmen / 你們 / 你们
Your (<i>one person</i>)	Nǐ de / 你的
Your (<i>MTOP</i>)	Nǐmen de / 你們的 / 你们的

Cluster Number Seventeen

He	Tā / 他
She	Tā / 她
His	Tā de / 他的
Her	Tā de / 她的
They	Tāmen / 他們 / 她們 / 他们 / 她们
Their	Tāmen de / 他們的 / 她們的 / 他们的 / 她们的

Cluster Number Eighteen

To drink	Hē / 喝
And	Hé / 和
To buy	Mǎi / 買 / 买
To sell	Mài / 賣 / 卖

Cluster Number Nineteen

Coffee	Kāfēi / 咖啡
Tea	Chá / 茶
Black	Wū / 烏 / 乌
Dragon	Lóng / 龍 / 龙
Oolong tea / Black dragon tea	Wūlóng chá / 烏龍茶 / 乌龙茶

Cluster Number Twenty

Jasmine	Mòlì / 茉莉
Flower	Huā / 花
Jasmine tea / Jasmine flower tea	Mòlìhuā chá / 茉莉花茶

Cluster Number Twenty One

To have	Yǒu / 有
Time / Times	Shíhou / 時候 / 时候
Sometimes / Have times	Yǒushíhou / 有時候 / 有时候
To ask	Wèn / 問 / 问
Question	Wèntí / 問題 / 问题

Cluster Number Twenty Two

To operate something	Kāi / 開 / 开
Car	Chē / 車 / 车
To drive	Kāi chē / 開車 / 开车

Cluster Number Twenty Three

Wind	Fēng / 風 / 风
Water	Shuǐ / 水
Feng shui	Fēngshuǐ / 風水 / 风水

Cluster Number Twenty Four

Want	Yào / 要
Think	Xiǎng / 想
Would like	Xiǎng yào / 想要
Can / Know how to	Huì / 會 / 会
Can / Be physically able to	Néng / 能

Cluster Number Twenty Five

Very	Hěn / 很
Good	Hǎo / 好
Please	Qǐng / 請 / 请
New	Xīn / 新

Cluster Number Twenty Six

To eat	Chī / 吃
To say / To speak	Shuō / 說 / 说
To do / To make	Zuò / 做
To use	Yòng / 用

Cluster Number Twenty Seven

Unit	Gè / 個 / 个
Surface unit	Tái / 台
Wheeled unit	Liàng / 輛 / 辆
A couple of	Liǎng / 兩 / 两

Cluster Number Twenty Eight

Spoken question mark	Ma / 嗎 / 吗
Le	Le / 了
Located in	Zài / 在

Cluster Number Twenty Nine

Not	Bù / 不
Not (<i>for use with "have"</i>)	Méi / 沒
But	Dànshì / 但是
What?	Shénme? / 什麼? / 什么?

Cluster Number Thirty

Mum	Māma / 媽媽 / 妈妈
Dad	Bàba / 爸爸
Thank you	Xièxie / 謝謝 / 谢谢

Cluster Number Thirty above is an interesting one. Each of the words it contains is made up of a sound that is repeated twice within that same word – **māma**, **bàba**, **xièxie** – but notice how the second time the sound is said it loses its original tone and instead becomes neutral. So, typically, instead of saying “**māmā**”, Chinese speakers say “**māma**”. And instead of saying “**bàbà**” Chinese speakers say **bàba**. And instead of saying “**xièxiè**” Chinese speakers say “**xièxie**”.

As you learn more Chinese, you’ll come across a number of doubled up sound words that do this – mostly it happens with the names of family members (mum, dad, brother, sister etc) but, as we’ve seen, it also happens with “thank you”.

Cluster Number Thirty One

On	Shàng / 上
Sea	Hǎi / 海
Shanghai	Shànghǎi / 上海

So, that's Cluster Number Thirty One done. Not too hard, I'm sure you'll agree.

Cluster Number Thirty Two though is a tad more problematic. Do you remember how, in Cluster Number Thirty, the final part of those words turned neutral? Well, a similar phenomenon is going to take place now in Cluster Number Thirty Two.

Cluster Number Thirty Two

Early	Zǎo / 早
Morning / Early on	Zǎoshang / 早上
Late	Wǎn / 晚
Evening / Late on	Wǎnshang / 晚上

Have you noticed that the “Shàng” from “Shànghǎi” has become neutral – simply “shang” – when it's placed on the end of these words? As with Cluster Number Thirty, this is simply something Chinese speakers will tend to do with “shàng” (when it's on the end of a word). However, as I say, it *only* happens when “shàng” / “上” is at the end of a word – not when it's at the beginning!

And by the way, if you do accidentally pronounce the “shàng” / “上” at the end of these words as a fourth tone instead of a neutral one, you *will* still be understood because, actually, many native speakers say it that way too – isn't that naughty of them! Officially, however, it is supposed to be pronounced as a neutral tone when it's on the end of these words and so, as you will want to learn official, standard Mandarin, you should make sure to pronounce the “shang” at the end of these words using a truly pathetic, neutral tone.⁷

⁷ So yes, as I've mentioned here, native speakers will not always pronounce things in exactly the same way. English pronunciation is not the same everywhere – compare England's, America's and Australia's pronunciation for example – and the same is true for the Chinese-speaking world. This means that, sometimes, there may be some minor differences in tones even amongst native speakers. The tones used in this booklet and in the accompanying tone review tracks follow the official standard set in Beijing. Variations in those tones by native speakers are not “wrong” however but merely represent regional variation – all of which is mutually intelligible. When studying the tones yourself though, I recommend following the official Beijing standard as provided in this booklet and on the tone review tracks.

Cluster Number Thirty Three

Meal	Cān / 餐
Breakfast / Early meal	Zǎocān / 早餐
Dinner / Late meal	Wǎncān / 晚餐
Hall	Tīng / 廳 / 厅
Restaurant / Meal hall	Cāntīng / 餐廳 / 餐厅

Thank goodness. Number Thirty Three was an easy one with no surprises. As for the next one...

Cluster Number Thirty Four

Guo	Guò / 過 / 过
Have eaten	Chīguo / 吃過 / 吃过
Have bought	Mǎiguò / 買過 / 买过
Have gone	Qùguo / 去過 / 去过

Notice how “**guò**” works exactly how “**shàng**” did earlier (in Cluster Number Thirty Two)? Just like “**shàng**”, “**guò**” becomes neutral when it’s placed on the ends of words (so, for talking about past experiences).

And as with “**shàng**”, if you do accidentally pronounce the “**guo**” at the end of these words as a fourth tone instead of a neutral one, you will still be understood. Nevertheless, try your best to let it be neutral and pathetic.

Now, make sure that before moving on to the next section you’ve reviewed the first thirty four clusters thoroughly and feel that you know them well because something unusual is coming up...

Tone Change Patterns

So, in Cluster Numbers Thirty, Thirty Two and Thirty Four, we encountered a phenomenon where the tones in Chinese can actually change. In those three clusters though, those changes were very minor and occurred because those specific, individual words just happen to be pronounced in that particular way.

There are, however, some other types of tone changes that occur in Chinese that follow a pattern and, if you intend to become an advanced speaker of Chinese, you will want to learn them.

Our first tone change pattern – Send the teacher upstairs!

To understand our first tone change pattern, you first of all need to remind yourself of the tones of the following words in Chinese. Do that now:

Read me	Cover me (while you think)
You	nǐ
Good / Well	hǎo

So, you've reminded yourself of the tones of those two words and so you know that both "you" and "good" are third tone words in Chinese – that's the exasperated teacher's tone, as I'm sure you remember from the audio part of the course.

So again, on their own, as you see them in the table above, these are both third tone words.

However, in Chinese, if you put two third tones next to one another, one of them will transform into a different tone. I'll say that again: *if you put two third tone words next to one another in Mandarin Chinese, one of them will transform into a different tone.*

Now, before you panic, please don't worry because this is just a fixed rule in Chinese that, fortunately, because of the way you've learned the tones during the course, will be very easy for you to remember and to apply in practice.

And why will it be easy? Because when you first learnt about the third tone, you learnt it as the exasperated teacher's tone and thinking of the tone in this way is going to allow you to remember and apply this tone change.

So, let's do that now!

Learning the tones – the Cluster Method

Imagine that we have put two third tones together – two exasperated teachers right next to one another. Well, what would happen in real life if you put two exasperated people together in the same room, right next to one another? Well, given that they're likely to not be in the best of moods, it's quite possible that they might end up arguing – they might even fight!

So, as that's the case, it would be sensible to separate them, to split them up. And how should we do that? Well, I think the best way would be to send the first one upstairs, out of the way.

So, this is what we shall do. When we have two exasperated teachers together, we will send the first of them upstairs so that they can't fight. By which I mean, when we have two third tones together, we will transform the first of them into a person upstairs's tone, a second tone (this is what I mean by "sending them upstairs").

Try doing this now, using the chart below. Once they are together, send the first of the third tones upstairs:

	Pronounced
You	nǐ
Good / Well	hǎo
Hello	nǐ hǎo

Do you notice how, once these two (originally third tone) words – these two exasperated teacher's tone words – are put together, the first of them gets sent upstairs (it becomes a second tone)?

Well, this is what happens in Chinese. Traditionally this is explained as: when a 3rd tone is followed by another 3rd tone, the first 3rd tone changes to a 2nd tone. Personally, however, I prefer to think that two exasperated teachers sat next to each other would fight – so for that reason we always send the first one upstairs.

Have a further practice with this phenomenon below:

	Pronounced
Very	hěn
Good / Well	hǎo
Very good / Very well	hěn hǎo

Something to quickly mention about Pinyin

Now, before we go on, there is one thing I should mention and it's related to the way Pinyin is written. I mention it so that hopefully neither this booklet nor any other materials that use the Romanized, Pinyin system will confuse you.

And what I want to mention is this: you'll notice how on the top, right-hand side of the chart above I've written "pronounced" above the Pinyin words. I've done this because that is how those words are *pronounced* but it is not how they will normally be *written* in Pinyin.

The reason they will not normally be written that way in Pinyin is because, when tone changes happen in Chinese as part of a pattern (like the one we're now learning) those tone changes *aren't* actually marked in the Pinyin. Instead, each word remains marked as if no tone change had occurred. Take a look at the following chart and you'll see what I mean:

	Pronounced	Written in Pinyin as
You	nǐ	nǐ
Good / Well	hǎo	hǎo
Hello	ní hǎo	nǐ hǎo
Very	hěn	hěn
Good / Well	hǎo	hǎo
Very good / Very well	hén hǎo	hěn hǎo

Now, you might be wondering, why on earth aren't the tone changes marked? Well, the reason for this is that the creators of Pinyin didn't want someone who was learning the language to read "ní hǎo" and think that "you" (nǐ) was *normally* pronounced "ní", which is something you might well assume if you saw it written that way.

So instead, when it comes to these tone changes that occur as part of a pattern, words written in Pinyin are simply left with their original tones and the reader is expected to know how to pronounce them correctly, as they are expected to know the tone change patterns.

So, when you see "nǐ hǎo" written down in Pinyin, you should pronounce it "ní hǎo" and when you see "hěn hǎo" written down, you should pronounce it "hén hǎo". You should do this because you've learned the rule that this tone change pattern in Mandarin Chinese follows, which is: when a 3rd tone is followed by another 3rd tone, send the first 3rd tone upstairs.

Now, let's try applying that rule one more time.

And this time we'll try it *within* a single word.

For example, “can” / “allowed to” in Mandarin is “kěyǐ”.

You can see how, within this word, we have two third tones next to each other. So, using the chart below, work out how this would actually be pronounced in Chinese:

	Pronounced	But still written in Pinyin as
Can / Allowed to / Alright to	kéyǐ	kěyǐ

So, once again, we have two third tones next to one another here – two exasperated teachers next to one another – and so we send the first one upstairs.

Now let's put all these examples of this pattern together and make our thirty fifth cluster for you to practise with:

Cluster Number Thirty Five

	Pronounced	Written as
You	nǐ	nǐ / 你
Good / Well	hǎo	hǎo / 好
Hello	Ní hǎo	Nǐ hǎo / 你好
How are you?	Ní hǎo ma?	Nǐ hǎo ma? / 你好嗎? / 你好嗎?
Very	hěh	hěh / 很
Very well	hén hǎo	hěh hǎo / 很好

Our second tone change pattern – Send the pit bull upstairs!

So, you've just learned your first tone change pattern above – but it's not the only one in Chinese. Let's move on to another that's equally important. First, work your way through this (very brief) chart:

Not	bù / 不
-----	--------

So, “bù” is a fourth tone word, a dog owner's tone. And the tone change that you are going to learn for this actually works in a somewhat similar way to the last one. This is how I want you to think about it:

If you follow “bù” – a fourth tone, a dog owner's tone word – with another fourth tone word, another dog owner's tone word, then the dogs will fight. Try thinking of “bù” in fact as a particularly aggressive dog, as he's the one who actually starts the fights. Perhaps he's a pit **bù**ll?

Anyway, when “bù” is followed by another fourth tone, by another dog owner out with their dog, this will lead to a fight. So, what do we do? Well, once again, to stop the fighting, we have to send one of them upstairs – and the one we'll send is “bù”, the pit **bù**ll.

Do that now in the chart below:

	Pronounced	Written in Pinyin as
Not	bù	bù
Want	yào	yào
Don't want / Not want	bú yào	bù yào

So, to avoid the two dogs fighting, you've sent “bù” upstairs – which is only fair, as he's the troublemaker after all.

So, the tone change we have just learned is that if “bù” is followed by another fourth tone word, by another dog owner out with their dog, then the dogs will fight. So to stop this we must send “bù” upstairs – we turn it into a second tone word. But keep in mind that only “bù” causes this problem. Normal fourth tones words can go together without any problem. It's “bù” – our little pit **bù**ll – that causes this tone change to happen. So, if “bù” is followed by another fourth tone, it changes to a second tone to avoid conflict!

Let's practise this in our thirty sixth cluster.

Cluster Number Thirty Six

	Pronounced	Written as
Not	bù	bù / 不
Want	yào	yào / 要
Don't want / Not want	bú yào	bù yào / 不要
I don't want	wǒ bú yào	wǒ bù yào / 我不要
I don't want to go.	Wǒ bú yào qù.	Wǒ bù yào qù. / 我不 要去。

Our third tone change pattern – One must take one's dog!

Okay, I have just one more tone change pattern that I want to teach you. First though, go through the chart below:

one	yī / 一
-----	--------

So, “yī” is a first tone word. However, it is *only* a first tone word when it's isolated, when it's used by itself (for instance, when you're counting individual numbers). Whenever it isn't by itself however – so, whenever it goes out and meets other tones – it always takes its dog with it.

So, by itself, one (“yī”) is a first tone word – but if you use it together with other words, it becomes a fourth tone word – it becomes a dog owner. **So again, “yī” is a first tone word only when it is by itself.** Whenever it isn't alone, whenever it's used together with other words, it always takes its dog with it.

Try that out below now:

	Pronounced	Written in Pinyin as
One	yī	yī
Dot / Point / To order	diǎn	diǎn
A little (<i>Southern</i>)	yì diǎn	yī diǎn
A little (<i>Northern</i>)	yì diǎnr	yī diǎnr

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So, “**yī**” has gone out to meet another tone and so has of course taken its dog for a walk with it. So, on its own it’s a first tone, but when it goes out, it takes its dog and so becomes a dog owner’s tone, a fourth tone.

Now, there’s just one more thing I should mention about one (“**yī**”) and then we will have finished our final cluster. Do you remember how “**bù**” – our little pit **bù**ll – got into fights with other dogs? Well, actually, “**yī**” is just the same. Although fourth tones normally go fine together, both “**bù**” and “**yī**” will get into fights if they encounter other fourth tones. So, given that “**yī**” always takes its dog out with it when it meets other tones, it has to be treated exactly like “**bù**” whenever it comes across another dog owner, another fourth tone. So, when “**yī**” meets a fourth tone, we have to send it upstairs.

Try that now:

	Pronounced	Written in Pinyin as
One	yī	yī
Unit	gè	gè
One unit	yí gè	yī gè

Now let’s put all that we’ve just learned about “**yī**” together in one final, glorious cluster.

Cluster Number Thirty Seven

	Pronounced	Written as
One	yī	yī / 一
Dot / Point / To order	diǎn	diǎn / 點 / 点
A little (Southern)	yì diǎn	yī diǎn / 一點 / 一点
A little (Northern)	yì diǎnr	yī diǎnr / 一點兒 / 一点儿
Unit	gè	gè / 個 / 个
One unit	yí gè	yī gè / 一個 / 一个

So “one” / “**yī**” when used in isolation – for instance when you’re counting out a series of numbers – is a first tone word.

When it goes out, however, it always takes its dog with it. This makes it a fourth tone word when it's placed in front of other Chinese words, unless...

Well, unless it meets another dog owner, in which case the dogs fight, and it gets sent upstairs.

Simple, yes?

What do you mean “no!”?

Well yes, you're right, “**yi**” is, I agree, really rather evil and full of strange complexities – but what can you do! Just try to think of it along the lines I have described above and you will get used to how it works – remember, it's far easier to learn a story about something than it is to memorize a series of arbitrary rules.

So, that's the tone changes that I wanted to teach you. You'll find that the final audio tracks on the audio course will allow you to quickly practise and review these – once you've worked your way through each of the clusters above.

A little more on tonal variation

As I briefly mentioned under some of the Clusters, there can be some minor tonal variations by region across the Chinese-speaking world. The total number of words that vary in tone is, however, small and the variations are highly unlikely to cause you any difficulties as a learner.

However, just in case you want to know, the following differences can be found amongst the words you have learned during the course:

	Official tones, as set in Beijing	Alternative pronunciation
morning	zǎoshang	zǎoshàng
evening	wǎnshang	wǎnshàng
mum	māma	māmā
sometimes	yǒushíhou	yǒushíhòu
tofu	dòufu	dòufǔ

Learning the tones – the Cluster Method

Some of these are extremely common variations. Indeed, you may find that you encounter more native speakers who say **wǎnshàng** and **dòufǔ** than who pronounce those words in the way the government in Beijing has decided is officially correct.

In this booklet, and on the audio tone review tracks, we also follow the standard set in Beijing to the letter but do be aware that, in the real world, there is some variation and that variations in those tones by native speakers are not wrong – rather they simply represent regional variation, all of which is mutually intelligible by native speakers.

Numbers

0	零	líng
1	一	yī
2	二	èr ⁸
3	三	sān
4	四	sì
5	五	wǔ
6	六	liù
7	七	qī
8	八	bā
9	九	jiǔ
10	十	shí
11	十一	shí yī
12	十二	shí èr
13	十三	shí sān
14	十四	shí sì
15	十五	shí wǔ
16	十六	shí liù
17	十七	shí qī
18	十八	shí bā
19	十九	shí jiǔ
20	二十	èr shí
21	二十一	èr shí yī
22	二十二	èr shí èr
23	二十三	èr shí sān
24	二十四	èr shí sì
25	二十五	èr shí wǔ
26	二十六	èr shí liù
27	二十七	èr shí qī
28	二十八	èr shí bā
29	二十九	èr shí jiǔ
30	三十	sān shí
31	三十一	sān shí yī
32	三十二	sān shí èr
33	三十三	sān shí sān
34	三十四	sān shí sì

⁸ “Èr” is the number 2 in Chinese. However, it is only used for counting and mathematics. Whenever you want to use the number two with a unit word – such as “gè” or “tái” or “liàng” – then you will instead say “a couple” – “liǎng”. So, “two computers” will never be “èr tái diànnǎo” but instead will always be “liǎng tái diànnǎo”.

Numbers

35	三十五	sān shí wǔ
36	三十六	sān shí liù
37	三十七	sān shí qī
38	三十八	sān shí bā
39	三十九	sān shí jiǔ
40	四十	sì shí
41	四十一	sì shí yī
42	四十二	sì shí èr
43	四十三	sì shí sān
44	四十四	sì shí sì
45	四十五	sì shí wǔ
46	四十六	sì shí liù
47	四十七	sì shí qī
48	四十八	sì shí bā
49	四十九	sì shí jiǔ
50	五十	wǔ shí
51	五十一	wǔ shí yī
52	五十二	wǔ shí èr
53	五十三	wǔ shí sān
54	五十四	wǔ shí sì
55	五十五	wǔ shí wǔ
56	五十六	wǔ shí liù
57	五十七	wǔ shí qī
58	五十八	wǔ shí bā
59	五十九	wǔ shí jiǔ
60	六十	liù shí
61	六十一	liù shí yī
62	六十二	liù shí èr
63	六十三	liù shí sān
64	六十四	liù shí sì
65	六十五	liù shí wǔ
66	六十六	liù shí liù
67	六十七	liù shí qī
68	六十八	liù shí bā
69	六十九	liù shí jiǔ
70	七十	qī shí
71	七十一	qī shí yī
72	七十二	qī shí èr
73	七十三	qī shí sān
74	七十四	qī shí sì
75	七十五	qī shí wǔ
76	七十六	qī shí liù

77	七十七	qī shí qī
78	七十八	qī shí bā
79	七十九	qī shí jiǔ
80	八十	bā shí
81	八十一	bā shí yī
82	八十二	bā shí èr
83	八十三	bā shí sān
84	八十四	bā shí sì
85	八十五	bā shí wǔ
86	八十六	bā shí liù
87	八十七	bā shí qī
88	八十八	bā shí bā
89	八十九	bā shí jiǔ
90	九十	jiǔ shí
91	九十一	jiǔ shí yī
92	九十二	jiǔ shí èr
93	九十三	jiǔ shí sān
94	九十四	jiǔ shí sì
95	九十五	jiǔ shí wǔ
96	九十六	jiǔ shí liù
97	九十七	jiǔ shí qī
98	九十八	jiǔ shí bā
99	九十九	jiǔ shí jiǔ
100	一百	yībǎi
101	一百零一	yī bǎi líng yī
102	一百零二	yī bǎi líng èr
103	一百零三	yī bǎi líng sān
104	一百零四	yī bǎi líng sì
105	一百零五	yī bǎi líng wǔ
106	一百零六	yī bǎi líng liù
107	一百零七	yī bǎi líng qī
108	一百零八	yī bǎi líng bā
109	一百零九	yī bǎi líng jiǔ
110	一百一十	yī bǎi yī shí
111	一百一十一	yī bǎi yī shí yī
112	一百一十二	yī bǎi yī shí èr
113	一百一十三	yī bǎi yī shí sān
114	一百一十四	yī bǎi yī shí sì
115	一百一十五	yī bǎi yī shí wǔ
116	一百一十六	yī bǎi yī shí liù
117	一百一十七	yī bǎi yī shí qī
118	一百一十八	yī bǎi yī shí bā

Numbers

119	一百一十九	yī bǎi yī shí jiǔ
120	一百二十	yī bǎi èr shí
121	一百二十一	yī bǎi èr shí yī
122	一百二十二	yī bǎi èr shí èr
200	兩百	liǎng bǎi
201	兩百零一	liǎng bǎi líng yī
202	兩百零二	liǎng bǎi líng èr
203	兩百零三	liǎng bǎi líng sān
204	兩百零四	liǎng bǎi líng sì
300	三百	sānbǎi
400	四百	sìbǎi
500	五百	wǔbǎi
600	六百	liùbǎi
700	七百	qībǎi
800	八百	bābǎi
900	九百	jiǔbǎi
1000	一千	yīqiān
2000	兩千	liǎng qiān
3000	三千	sānqiān
4000	四千	sìqiān
5000	五千	wǔqiān
6000	六千	liùqiān
7000	七千	qīqiān
8000	八千	bāqiān
9000	九千	jiǔqiān
10,000	一萬	yī wàn
20,000	兩萬	liǎng wàn
30,000	三萬	sān wàn
40,000	四萬	sì wàn
50,000	五萬	wǔ wàn
60,000	六萬	liù wàn
70,000	七萬	qī wàn
80,000	八萬	bā wàn
90,000	九萬	jiǔ wàn
100,000	十萬	shí wàn
1 million	一百萬	yībǎi wàn
2 million	兩百萬	liǎng bǎi wàn
3 million	三百萬	sānbǎi wàn
10 million	一千萬	yīqiān wàn
20 million	兩千萬	liǎng qiān wàn
100 million	一億	yī yì

CD track listing

CD1

1	How to use this course
2	The Chinese language
3	I want
4	You want
5	Yes and no
6	Practising “yes” and “no”
7	Want-not-want
8	Chinese food culture
9	Pockmarked Grandma’s Tofu
10	Tea
11	To go
12	He / She
13	Chinese has tones
14	A little review
15	I would like
16	A little

CD2

1	Practising with “I would like”
2	Pronunciation of chī vs qù
3	Shortening “I would like”
4	Practising with the shortened “I would like”
5	Restaurant
6	Dinner

7	Reviewing “want-not-want”
8	Hello. How are you?
9	Practising “I would like”
10	Yangzhou’s claim to fame
11	But
12	To order

CD3

1	The 1st and 2nd tones
2	Practising the 1st and 2nd tones
3	The shortened version of “would like”
4	Wind water
5	Can
6	Answering “yes” or “no”
7	Practising answering “yes” or “no”
8	We and they
9	A brief review
10	What?
11	Please may I ask?
12	To do / to make
13	A little revision

CD track listing

CD4

1	I eat, I drink, I go, I ask
2	I ate, I drank, I went, I asked
3	“Yes” for the past
4	Practising “yes” for the past
5	My, your, his, her, their
6	They ate our dinner!
7	Yesterday
8	Morning and evening
9	“I would like” – a little revision

CD5

1	The 3rd and 4th tones
2	Practising the 3rd and 4th tones
3	Mobile phone
4	Mobile phone continued
5	1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th tone practice
6	Tone summary
7	One unit
8	A good / new mobile phone
9	A little revision
10	Handbag
11	Have / don't have
12	Review of positive past
13	Introduction of negative past

CD6

1	More negative past
2	“Yes” and “no” for the past
3	More past practice
4	Guò
5	China
6	Chinatown
7	Reviewing the negative past
8	Negative guò
9	Reviewing the past
10	Reviewing “can” and “would like”

CD7

1	The future
2	Practise using yào for the future
3	Tomorrow, I'm going to buy a new mobile phone.
4	One surface unit computer
5	A laptop
6	Next year
7	Sweet and sour pork
8	A little (Northern pronunciation)
9	Dishes / vegetables

CD8

1	Plain rice / white rice
2	Last year
3	Reviewing mobile phones, handbags and laptops
4	Revision
5	Reviewing the future
6	Reviewing “can, can’t, want, don’t want, would like, wouldn’t like”
7	Further reviewing
8	Still more reviewing
9	The neutral tone
10	Reviewing the present

CD9

1	The present with “ing”
2	To say / to speak
3	Wèn vs wén
4	English
5	My mum / my mom
6	Can – kěyǐ vs huì
7	Peking Duck
8	I know how to make Peking Duck
9	To use

CD10

1	To drive
2	Can / physically able to
3	kěyǐ vs huì vs néng
4	kěyǐ vs huì vs néng continued
5	Past, present, future review
6	Reviewing unit words
7	Wheeled unit
8	Vocabulary review
9	A couple
10	Do you have roast duck?

CD11

1	Skipping the “one unit” part
2	Creating words out of other words
3	When to specify the one unit part
4	Emphasising the time
5	Answering “yes” and “no”
6	A little review
7	Mini past, present review
8	Skipping the “one unit” part review
9	I can speak Chinese
10	End of main course
11	Course review introduction
12	Course review: “want”
13	Course review: “would like”
14	Course review: “can (allowed to / alright to)”
15	Course review: “can (know how to)”

CD12

1	Course review: “can (physically able to)”	24	Cluster Number Fourteen
2	Course review: the present	25	Cluster Number Fifteen
3	Course review: the present with “ing”	26	Cluster Number Sixteen
4	Course review: the past with le	27	Cluster Number Seventeen
5	Course review: the past with le continued	28	Cluster Number Eighteen
6	Course review: the past with guò	29	Cluster Number Nineteen
7	Course review: the future (using the present)	30	Cluster Number Twenty
8	Course review: the future (using yào)	31	Cluster Number Twenty One
9	Tone review introduction 1	32	Cluster Number Twenty Two
10	Tone review introduction 2	33	Cluster Number Twenty Three
11	Cluster Number One	34	Cluster Number Twenty Four
12	Cluster Number Two	35	Cluster Number Twenty Five
13	Cluster Number Three	36	Cluster Number Twenty Six
14	Cluster Number Four	37	Cluster Number Twenty Seven
15	Cluster Number Five	38	Cluster Number Twenty Eight
16	Cluster Number Six	39	Cluster Number Twenty Nine
17	Cluster Number Seven	40	Cluster Number Thirty
18	Cluster Number Eight	41	Cluster Number Thirty One
19	Cluster Number Nine	42	Cluster Number Thirty Two
20	Cluster Number Ten	43	Cluster Number Thirty Three
21	Cluster Number Eleven	44	Cluster Number Thirty Four
22	Cluster Number Twelve	45	Cluster Number Thirty Five
23	Cluster Number Thirteen	46	Cluster Number Thirty Six
		47	Cluster Number Thirty Seven
		48	Numbers
		49	Goodbye